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SUBJECT: THIRD KLYCHKO-CHERNOVETSKYI BOUT?

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Classified By: Political Counselor Colin Cleary for reasons 1.4 (b,d)

Summary

¶1. (C) World champion boxer Vitaliy Klychko, who lost two bids for mayor of Kyiv in 2006 and 2008, hit current mayor Chernovetskyi hard for alleged corruption in a recent meeting with us. Although Klychko was vague about another run for mayor, he said that his political bloc would continue to challenge Chernovetskyi's control over the city council. There has been speculation that the national Rada could attempt to remove Mayor Chernovetskyi following continued allegations of corruption and a recent Rada commission to determine his psychological condition. Embassy contacts, however, do not expect his removal or another round of city elections in the near term. Although polls show a drop in support for Chernovetskyi, he still has a solid voter base and reportedly has the backing of President Yushchenko. Chernovetskyi's critics expect him to use his clout as mayor in the upcoming presidential elections to try to ally himself with the next president. End Summary.

The Contenders

¶2. (U) The leading political forces on the city council are the Chernovetskyi bloc with 43 seats, PM Tymoshenko's bloc (BYuT) with 32 seats, and the Klychko bloc with 15 seats. The Party of Regions, with the largest faction in the national parliament, has only six seats on the city council. Chernovetskyi, who became mayor in 2006, delivered a blow to Tymoshenko in his May 2008 pre-term election win over BYuT candidate Turchynov and boxer Vitaliy Klychko, who took a close third.

¶3. (C) Most observers see Klychko as Chernovetskyi's most serious challenger. Political Analyst Vitaliy Bala told us that although BYuT has significant popular support in the city, BYuT does not have a candidate who can beat the Mayor. BYuT's best option, he felt, would be for it to cooperate with the other blocs on the city council to form a united opposition. Bala believes that Klychko could knock out Chernovetskyi in another challenge for city hall with BYuT in his corner.

Klychko Hits Chernovetskyi Hard on Corruption

¶4. (C) Vitaliy Klychko, who looked fit after his recent WBC title defense, made many of the same points he has been telling reporters in a recent meeting with Emboff. He asserted that Chernovetskyi had turned the city into a family business, appointing his wife, children, and close relatives to key posts in the city administration. He described rampant corruption under Chernovetskyi, saying that the city's Soviet-era infrastructure was near collapse due to his neglect. Klychko said that the city had reached a "point of no return" and that new leaders were needed to replace Chernovetskyi and his "young and cynical" supporters in the

city government.

A Third Bout?

15. (C) When asked about his intention to run for Kyiv mayor again, Klychko ducked the question and said his German friends tell him he should run for the Mayor of Hamburg. However, Klychko has previously said that he feels obligated to run against Chernovetskyi if elections are held. He told us that his bloc is committed to taking on the mayor in the city council. He added that his bloc would run for the national Rada if early elections are called.

Mayor on Ropes but Not Out

16. (C) Mayor Chernovetskyi, who has held the post since 2006, has earned the nickname "Cosmos" and widespread condemnation for his eccentric public behavior. There has been speculation that the national Rada would try to remove him from office after highly publicized corruption allegations. The speculation was further fueled when the national Rada formed a special commission in March 2008 to determine his mental stability. He refused to submit to the psychological evaluation ordered by the Rada commission countering that it was politically motivated. Polls in recent months show that Chernovetskyi has lost support since his reelection. Observers attribute this to arbitrary hikes ordered by the Mayor for public transport and utility fees and the imposition of a widely-criticized decision to charge entry fees at city cemeteries. However, analyst Vitaliy Bala estimated the mayor continues to have solid support from roughly 15 percent of Kyiv voters, mostly the elderly who

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received benefits from city social programs.

BYuT in Klychko's Corner, but not for Early Elections

17. (C) National Rada Deputy Volodymyr Bondarenko of BYuT blasted Chernovetskyi for "destroying" the independence of the city council. He accused Chernovetskyi of corrupt land deals, nepotism, undue influence over the city-owned media, and neglect of the city's infrastructure. Although Chernovetskyi has lost some popular support, Bondarenko felt the mayor would not go down easily. Bondarenko said that the opposition lost in 2008 because it was not unified behind a single contender. He said that BYuT was consulting with the Klychko bloc on how best to challenge Chernovetskyi on the city council and future elections. He strongly denied rumors that Tymoshenko had been cooperating with the mayor. Tymoshenko, who had engineered the 2008 Rada vote for early elections, was opposed to new round of elections, he said. Bondarenko explained that Tymoshenko would reconsider a push to oust Chernovetskyi after the political and economic crises pass - perhaps in 2010.

Mayor's Cornerman?

18. (C) Political Analyst Vitaliy Bala described the Mayor as an opportunist who had managed to fend off challenges by the PM and other opponents with the quiet support of the President. Bala said that Yushchenko continued to back Chernovetskyi because the mayor was the only effective counterweight to BYuT in the city. Bala said that Presidential Secretariat Chief of Staff Viktor Baloha would block any efforts to remove Chernovetskyi until after the presidential election. Baloha, whom Bala regards as a tough political brawler, wants to use Kyiv's media and administrative resources in the presidential elections. For his part, Chernovetskyi needs the support of the President to pre-empt corruption investigations by his enemies, said Bala.

Dirty Fight Ahead

19. (C) Klychko felt that Chernovetskyi would offer city media coverage and resources to any presidential contender

who promised to keep him in city hall. Klychko reminded us that the city-owned media did not provide Chernovetskyi, s opponents equal coverage in the 2008 city elections - a claim supported by media watchdogs (reftel). Analyst Bala, who said Kyiv was still a "blank spot on the political map", expects Kyiv to be hotly contested in the presidential campaign. His message was that the gloves will come off in a "dirty" presidential campaign because the top contenders have "everything to lose."

Comment

¶10. (C) Klychko appears to be serious about fighting corruption at city hall and he seemed ready to take on Chernovetskyi. Despite a drop in polls, Chernovetskyi shows no signs of backing away. The mayor is in a position to make city resources available in the upcoming presidential elections and, based on past behavior, will try to use this to secure his own political future as presidential contenders square off.

TAYLOR